

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS SURVEY
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
January 2003

Name of Property: **WASHINGTON–ROCHAMBEAU REVOLUTIONARY ROUTE**

States: Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, Massachusetts, and the District of Columbia

Significant Dates: July 1780 through December 1782

NHL Criteria: 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6

Themes: (1) The Washington–Rochambeau Route is of national significance as a national cross-cultural experience.
 (2) The Washington–Rochambeau Route is of national significance as a manifestation of the international war effort.

Previous Recognition:

Proposals to recognize the route date at least to the 1920s. Federal action dates to February 17, 1976, when a House resolution called upon federal, state, county and local governments to recognize the route as the “Washington–Rochambeau Historic Route”; the Senate passed same resolution on August 25, 1976.

Several isolated road segments and numerous structures associated with the route are listed on the National Register. Several of these are National Landmarks. The State of Connecticut recently began systematically nominating resources associated with the route to the National Register.

National Historic Context:

French General Jean Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, Comte de Rochambeau, sailed into Newport in July of 1780 with an army of 5,300 officers and men. After wintering in Newport, Rochambeau’s army marched through Rhode Island and Connecticut and joined General George Washington’s Continental Army in Philipsburg, New York.

Abandoning the idea of attacking New York, held by the British under General Clinton, Washington and Rochambeau devised instead a southern campaign to attack General Cornwallis in Virginia. Their armies marched through New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia providing the Franco-American armies an opportunity to get acquainted before together attacking the British-fortified town of Yorktown. A French fleet under the command of Admiral de Grasse blocked the Chesapeake Bay to either reinforcement from New York or sea escape from Yorktown. On October 19, 1781, after three weeks of siege, General Cornwallis surrendered to General Washington, marking Yorktown as one of the most decisive American victories in the War for Independence. The march to siege and victory at Yorktown became the crucible for a friendship with France that has endured through two World Wars.

Shortly after Cornwallis’ surrender, Washington and the Continentals returned to defend northern posts. Rochambeau and his army wintered in Williamsburg, then marched back in the summer of 1782. The return march provided opportunities to celebrate the comradeship in arms, forged in the trenches before Yorktown. While small contingents stayed in different ports and left for France the following year, the bulk of Rochambeau’s army sailed from Boston on Christmas Eve 1782.

The route provides the opportunity to acknowledge the crucial contributions of America's chief ally France toward independence. It acknowledges the diversity of races, cultures, and religions that fought, suffered, and died for American independence, and commemorates the victory that won that independence. It also celebrates the achievements of under-represented groups such as African-Americans within the Continental Army that have long been missing in the standard histories of the war.

NHL Significance:

NHL Criterion 1: *(events that represent broad national patterns of US history)*

- It is an indispensable component of the Yorktown Campaign because it is the route that took the combined Franco-American armies to victory; and it commemorates the crucial role of France in that victory and of 225 years of Franco-American friendship.
- The Washington–Rochambeau Revolutionary Route is a manifestation of an international war effort at the time of the American War for Independence.
- It links and helps define the development of the United States as a community, as the thirteen colonies made a gigantic step toward becoming a nation.
- It expresses gratitude that greeted the returning French army on its march north in the summer of 1782, reflecting the crucial contributions of France toward the achievement of American independence.

NHL Criterion 2: *(associated importantly with nationally significant persons)*

- The Washington–Rochambeau Revolutionary Route is the example of joint Franco-American cooperation under the overall leadership of General George Washington.
- It is also associated with comte Rochambeau, Henry Knox, the duc de Lauzun, Alexander Hamilton, Admiral de Grasse, Colonel Lamb, comte de Deux-Ponts, Baron Steuben, the marquis de Lafayette, and Lord Cornwallis.

NHL Criterion 3: *(represents ideas or ideals)*

- The Washington–Rochambeau Revolutionary Route is an expression of the hope for independence rekindled in Patriot hearts with the mobilization of the French forces.
- The union of French and Continental armies is among the first acknowledgments of America as a sovereign nation.
- As a domestic cross-cultural experience, it is a pivotal event in the development of an American identity because our encounter with Frenchmen served as vivid reminders of who we were and were not.

NHL Criterion 5: *(illustrates a way of life or culture)*

- Training and expertise provided by French advisers and volunteers helped shape the Continental Army and its successor, the United States Army, into a skilled, professional fighting force. French influence remained strong in the US military long after the end of the conflict. Even today, the US Army Corps of Engineers awards the Fleury Medal for excellence in engineering, while the coat of arms and the motto of the US Army Engineering School are that of the French school at Mezières: Essayons! — Let us try!

NHL Criterion 6: *(likely to yield information)*

- Camp sites are likely to yield valuable information for understanding the everyday life and influences upon the French and the Continental soldier, as well as the communities nearby that served the needs of the marching armies.

Integrity:

A network of roads traversed colonial America, some used for centuries by Native Americans, which were the economic lifelines of the colonies. Known variably as “Post Road,” “King’s Highway” or “Old Trail,” these roads were used for multiple purposes such as travel, trade, and military campaigns. The roads that constitute the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route pre-date the war. After the outbreak of war, the armies took these roads during their operations. Their use as conduits for the deployment of the opposing forces was well established before the French and American armies took them in 1781 and 1782.

The route consists of sections of various lengths of these colonial roads, such as the Boston Post Road in Connecticut, the Albany Post Road in New York, the Assunpink Trail in New Jersey, and the King's Highway in Delaware. These roads are interspersed with mountainous passes such as the Clove in Suffern, New York, and the crossing over the Susquehanna at Bald Friar Ferry and Ford in Maryland. When strung together, they formed the fastest and most convenient way to reach Williamsburg in 1781.

Based on original documents, the historic locations of the land and water routes that form the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route can be identified with accuracy and detail on a modern map. The roads that formed the French route were surveyed by Louis Alexandre de Berthier following the march. On the American side, Washington's cartographer Robert Erskine surveyed the roads in New York and New Jersey during the 1770s. The roads south from Philadelphia to Yorktown were surveyed in 1781, by order of Washington, to facilitate the march to Yorktown.

Except for a short section (Trenton, New Jersey, through Philadelphia and Delaware to Head of Elk, Maryland) the route consists of multiple routes. Military needs determined the route taken by Lauzun's Legion in Connecticut in June and that of Continental Army units through New Jersey in August of 1781. The logistics of providing thousands of men with food, firewood and shelter made it necessary for the units to follow different routes. Slow-moving artillery and the wagon train took a land-route to Williamsburg, while the men boarded ships in Baltimore and Annapolis.

Today, the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route survives in many manifestations such as local places such as *French Hill* and *Hussars Place* and in the names of towns along the route such as Crompond, New York, re-named Yorktown Heights. It can also be found in the extant houses where French and American officers stayed and in the campsites for the enlisted men. It also survives in historical markers and commemorative events along the route.

Though the route is diverse, it is clearly discernible in a multitude of modern manifestations. Many, if not all, of these roads still exist under different names and in different conditions, ranging from six-lane Interstate highways to abandoned road segments. Whether in Eastern Connecticut along country roads flanked by eighteenth-century stone walls or through rural Virginia, one can see this historic route. On other sections of the route, e.g., through cities or industrial areas, 200 years of economic development have all but obliterated the route. But even there, memorials keep alive the awareness of historic ground or trail. In some states, such as Virginia, the marking is consistent and highly visible. Some other states, such as Connecticut, are engaged in re-marking the trail.

Origins of Nomination: The study was authorized under PL106-473, sponsored by Congressman Larson (CT) in the House, and Senators Lieberman and Todd (CT) in the Senate.

Cost of Nomination to the Public: Funding for the trail feasibility study is estimated at \$300-400,000 spread across 4 years.

Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:

- There were 42 co-sponsors of the House authorizing bill, representing each of the states affected by the route, and the District of Columbia.
- Broad public interest and support was registered in the 4 public scoping meetings held Virginia, DC, New Jersey, and Connecticut in spring 2002. Citizens are organizing in groups such as the W3R committee to advance recognition of the route.
- Numerous national patriotic organizations support this project, including the Sons of the American Revolution, Daughters of the American Revolution, and the Society of the Cincinnati.
- The SHPOs in each of the states expressed interest and offered support at the NCSHPO meeting in March 2002.
- Several states have initiated more detailed resource surveys to protect resources associated with the route. Connecticut, New York, Rhode Island, and Delaware have appointed state commissions to advance commemoration of the route.

- There is considerable international interest in the project, particularly in France. The 225th anniversary of the signing of the Franco–American Alliance will be celebrated in many venues (including Philadelphia and Versailles) on February 6, 2003.
- The project contributes to the NPS initiative to heighten public awareness of the 225th anniversary of the American Revolution.

Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:

- A property rights organization has submitted approximately 300 signatures from New Jersey residents on a petition as follows: “PETITION TO (FEDERAL) NAT’L. PARK SERVICE We, the sportsmen and citizens undersigned oppose the establishment of the national historic trail titled Washington-Rochameau [sic] Route. Nat’l historic trails already established have brought backdoor federal zoning and controls, been restrictive to hunting, and cut off road access to rivers! Nat’l Park Service has established and wishes to establish additional United Nations Biospheres and World Sites in America!” This group also opposed the NPS Crossroads of the American Revolution Heritage Area study.
- No other known.